

Week Ending Friday, March 17, 2000

**The President's Radio Address**

*March 11, 2000*

Good morning. In just a few days, Congress will begin to write the next year's budget. This is an important challenge we in Washington take up every year, with important consequences for the American people. Today I want to talk to you about the outcome I seek for our families and our future.

I've always thought you could tell a lot about people's priorities by what they do first. For me, above all, that means maintaining the fiscal discipline that has brought us to this point of unprecedented prosperity, with 21 million new jobs, the lowest unemployment in 30 years, the longest economic expansion in history. It means staying on the path to make America debt-free by 2013. It means saving Social Security, strengthening Medicare, modernizing it with a voluntary prescription drug benefit that so many of our seniors need and too few can afford. And it means continuing to put the education of our children first, with higher standards, more and better trained teachers, after-school and summer school programs, modernizing our schools.

These are my first priorities. I think they're most Americans' first priorities. But it seems the congressional majority has hardly given them a second thought. Before Republican leaders have put a single penny toward strengthening Social Security or Medicare; before they put a single penny toward a prescription drug benefit; before they put a single penny toward educating our children, they've allocated nearly half a trillion dollars to risky tax cuts. More than half our money already spent—and not a penny on our most pressing priorities.

Unfortunately, the majority tried to take us down this road before. Last year, they went for one big tax cut with one big grab. This year, they're doing it piece by piece, one tax cut after another. Just this week, we

saw Republican leaders attach special-interest tax breaks to what should have been a simple raise in the minimum wage. Now, all these cuts together add up to a serious threat to Social Security and Medicare. They would make it impossible to pay down the debt by 2013 or make vital investments in education, fighting crime, protecting public health and the environment, and other urgent national priorities.

As the budget process begins, I urge Republican leaders to change their course and steer clear of a fiscal dead end. It's wrong for America. It was wrong last year, and it's wrong this year. Let's do first things first.

I urge Congress to write a budget that puts aside enough funds from our hard-won surplus to eliminate the debt by 2013; to write a budget that strengthens and modernizes Medicare with a prescription drug benefit; to write a budget that extends the solvency of Social Security; one that invests in education, extends health coverage to more American families, and meets other pressing priorities.

Of course, Congress still has plenty of time to get its work done right and get it done on time. I hope it will do so. If Congress takes care of first things first, we can also give targeted tax relief to America's families: a tax credit to help pay for college or save for retirement; a tax credit to help care for aging or ailing loved ones; a tax relief to reduce the marriage penalty; tax relief to reward work and family with an expanded earned-income tax credit; an increased tax credit for child care expenses.

I will work with any Member of either party to get these things done. We can get them done, but only in the context of a realistic, responsible, balanced budget, one that maintains our fiscal discipline and makes the most of this great moment of prosperity. Now, that's a budget that makes sense. One that works for working Americans.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

## Interview With Sam Donaldson of ABC's "This Week"

March 10, 2000

### Gun Control Legislation

**Mr. Donaldson.** Mr. President, thank you very much for letting us come over and talk to you today. You know, among your top legislative priorities, everyone understands, is gun control. You want trigger safety locks; you want a 3-day waiting period for the sale at gun shows; you want photo ID's, among other things. Going to be tough to get?

**The President.** It's tough to get. We were able to get the Brady bill passed in '93 and the assault weapons ban in '94. And unfortunately, several of the Members who voted for those were defeated because they did. But it's a safer country because of that.

We've had half a million people who couldn't buy handguns because they were felons, fugitives, or stalkers, and we've got the gun death rate down to a 30-year low. So I think nearly everybody who looked at it thinks we ought to close the gun show loophole and require child safety locks on guns and ban the importation of these large ammunition clips. I hope we can do that.

**Mr. Donaldson.** The NRA says that the gun manufacturers have trigger locks now. They say all of the guns being manufactured in this country, the handguns, have the trigger locks. So what's the big deal?

**The President.** They don't all, actually; most of them do. We've worked with a lot of the gun manufacturers, and they deserve a lot of credit. And for the first time, they really showed some genuine independence from the NRA line that nothing ever needs to be done, ever. And they came up with the child trigger locks.

What our legislation would do would be to require the manufacturers to do it. And I would also like to see them make those available to retrofit guns, because a lot of people who have guns now in their homes would like to buy them, would like to protect them in that way. But I think that it would be important.

But closing the gun show loophole is really important because a lot of people who now know they will be checked in gun stores can go to the urban flea markets or to the gun shows and buy a gun and have no background check whatever. And I think it's a big mistake.

**Mr. Donaldson.** Well, of course the NRA says, "We're for that. We're for an instant check at gun shows." And they say, "The Congress appropriated money for you to put into the system so that the insta-check, just like our credit cards, can go through." And they say, "Why hasn't he done it?"

**The President.** Well, not all the records are subject to insta-check. For example, we offer, by the way—most of their allies in Congress want a 24-hour, not a 72-hour waiting period at gun shows. And there's something to be said for that if it's a weekend show and the people are moving on to somewhere else, and all that. So what we offered them was, okay, 24 hours for every one you can check in 24 hours, but over 90 percent of them you can check in 24 hours. But for those you can't check because of some problem with it, we ought to be able to hold them up to 3 days, because the ones that don't check out in 24 hours are 20 times more likely to be rejected because of the problems with the background.

So I think we can work this out. You know, when I brought the Congress in there the other day, the Republican leader in the House, Mr. Hyde, and the Democratic leader, Mr. Conyers, had competing proposals that were much closer together than the rhetoric of the debate would suggest. So I'm still hoping we can work this out.

I think it's fine to let the ones go in 24 hours if you can do the check. But if there is some problem with the records, getting the records, there ought to be some provision to deposit the gun in a neutral place, like the local sheriff's office or something, and finish the check.

**Mr. Donaldson.** When it comes to photo ID's, the NRA says what they say of a lot of your proposals. That is, the criminals are not going to line up; the criminals are not going to come in and say, "Take my picture;